

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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SUBJECT: DOMINICA GOVERNMENT TO SEEK INDEPENDENCE ON NOVEMBER 2,
1977

1. ON DECEMBER 20, ACTING GOVERNOR OF DOMINICA LEO AUSTIN
ANNOUNCED IN AN ADDRESS TO DOMINICA'S HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF DOMINICA WOULD SEEK INDEPENDENCE
FROM BRITAIN ON NOVEMBER 2, 1977. PREMIER PATRICK JOHN,
ALSO SPEAKING IN THE HOUSE, ADDED THAT THERE WOULD BE NO
REFERENDUM BEFORE INDEPENDENCE, WHICH IS BEING SOUGHT UN-
DER SECTION 10 (2) OF THE 1967 WEST INDIES ACT. A DRAFT
CONSTITUTION FOR INDEPENDENT DOMINICA HAS BEEN CIRCULATED
FOR STUDY AND COMMENT BY PARLIAMENT. THE DOCUMENT RETAINS THE
GENERAL GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE OF THE PRESENT ASSO-
CIATED STATE CONSTITUTION, EXCEPT FOR A PROVISION FOR AN
INDEPENDENT SUPREME COURT AND PROVISION FOR CONTROL
BY THE DOMINICAN GOVERNMENT OVER SUCH MATTERS AS EXTERNAL
AFFAIRS AND DEFENSE, FORMERLY RESERVED TO THE BRITISH.
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2. COMMENT: THE OPPOSITION FREEDOM PARTY HAS STATED THAT
THEY ARE NOT IN FAVOR OF INDEPENDENCE UNDER SECTION 10 (2). THEY
WERE HOPING TO FORCE THE ISSUE TO A REFERENDUM, WHICH WOULD
BE TANTAMOUNT TO A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE/NO CONFIDENCE IN THE
JOHN GOVERNMENT. HOWEVER, THE FREEDOM PARTY'S OPPOSITION

TO THE MOVE IS NOT EXPECTED TO HAVE MUCH EFFECT. ONCE THEY AND OTHER OPPOSITION GROUPS ACCEPT THE INEVITABILITY OF INDEPENDENCE IN 1977, THEIR ATTENTION WILL PROBABLY BE FOCUSED ON THE DETAILS OF THE CONSTITUTION RATHER THAN ON THE ISSUE OF THE MEANS BY WHICH INDEPENDENCE IS SECURED. FOR THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS, RADICAL LEFTIST COMMITTEES UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF ROSSEVEL ("ORSIE") DOUGLAS HAVE SPONSORED A SERIES OF DEBATES ON THE CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUE, AND ALTHOUGH THEY ARE STRONGLY IN FAVOR OF INDEPENDENCE, IT IS LIKELY THAT THEY WILL DEMAND ALTERNATIONS IN THE PROPOSED DRAFT CONSTITUTION IN ORDER TO CONSTRUCT A MORE SOCIALISTIC STATE.

3. IF DOMINICA IS SUCCESSFUL IN ATTAINING INDEPENDENCE WITHOUT A REFERENDUM, SUCH AN OUTCOME WILL PROBABLY HAVE AN IMPACT ON ST. LUCIA'S INDEPENDENCE MOVES AS WELL. ALREADY THE ST. LUCIAN GOVERNMENT HAS BASED ARGUMENTS FOR INDEPENDENCE WITHOUT A REFERENDUM ON THE EXPERIENCE OF GRENADA, AND THESE ARGUMENTS WILL BE IMMEASURABLY STRENGTHENED BY AN INDEPENDENT DOMINICA. BRITAIN WOULD BE HARD PRESSED TO ACCEPT THIS METHOD IN THE CASES OF GRENADA AND DOMINICA, AND REJECT IT IN THE CASE OF ST. LUCIA. A CRUCIAL DIS-SIMILARITY BETWEEN THEM HOWEVER MAY BE THAT BOTH THE GOVERNMENT OF DOMINICA AND THE GOVERNMENT OF GRENADA HAD WIDE MAJORITIES IN PARLIAMENT AT THE TIME INDEPENDENCE WAS REQUESTED. ST. LUCIA'S GOVERNMENT HAS A VERY SLIM MAJORITY, AND IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT MAY BE WARY OF GRANTING INDEPENDENCE UNDER SUCH UNSTABLE CONDITIONS.

4. SECTION 10(2) OF THE WEST INDIES ACT WAS USED
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BY GRENADA IN 1974 TO GAIN INDEPENDENCE FROM BRITAIN, AND PROVIDES FOR TERMINATION OF ASSOCIATED STATEHOOD BY AN ORDER IN COUNCIL IF BRITAIN SO DESIRES. THE USE OF THE PROVISION IS A METHOD OF CIRCUMVENTING THE MORE STRINGENT CONDITIONS OF SECTION 10(1) OF THE WEST INDIES ACT, WHEREBY AN ACT OF PARLIAMENT AND A POPULAR REFERENDUM ARE REQUIRED, AND, IN BOTH CASES, A TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY MUST BE OBTAINED.

END COMMENT.
BRITTON

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